

“Marital Transfer and the Welfare of Women”

(in English)



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Abstract

Throughout history, marriage has often been accompanied by substantial exchange of wealth. The practice of dowry-giving, in particular, has shown considerable diversity across cultures and over time. In my earlier works, I suggested that dowry can be considered a pre-mortem bequest by a woman's parents to her at the time of her wedding, which can help establish her position and safeguard her welfare in the new conjugal household. This hypothesis is, however, not consistent with the dominant view in the Asian subcontinent, where inflating dowry is now considered a social evil responsible for the plights and even deaths of many women. Despite these apparently polar opposite views of dowry, some recent studies have suggested that dowry, as practiced in India today, is not a homogeneous transfer, but is instead a combination of different transactions serving different functions. In this paper, I use a survey data set from India to decompose the transfer into various components, and identify their effects on the status of the wife within the household. It is found that a larger transfer from the bride's parents to the bride will indeed enhance her decision-making role, while a larger transfer to the groom's family has no effect. This suggests an outright ban on dowry may not necessarily serve the interest of women in India.

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Time: 2:00pm – 3:30pm
Venue: SO322, Dorothy Y. L. Wong Building

Biography

Dr. William Chan received his Ph.D in economics from the University of Chicago. He has taught at the Chinese University of Hong Kong before joining the University of Hong Kong in 1996, where he is currently Associate Professor in the School of Economics and Finance. His research interest is in labour economics and applied price theory, ranging from the effect of dowry on the welfare of women to internal promotion vs external recruitment within firms.

All are welcome

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